

立法會  
*Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. CB(1)406/20-21  
(These minutes have been seen  
by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/ITB

**Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting**

**Minutes of meeting**  
**held on Monday, 9 November 2020, at 2:30 pm**  
**in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex**

**Members present** : Dr Hon Junius HO Kwan-yiu, JP (Chairman)  
Hon CHAN Kin-por, GBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)  
Hon James TO Kun-sun  
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, GBS, JP  
Hon WONG Ting-kwong, GBS, JP  
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP  
Hon Paul TSE Wai-chun, JP  
Hon Claudia MO  
Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun, BBS, JP  
Hon Frankie YICK Chi-ming, SBS, JP  
Hon WU Chi-wai, MH  
Hon YIU Si-wing, BBS  
Hon MA Fung-kwok, GBS, JP  
Hon Charles Peter MOK, JP  
Hon CHAN Han-pan, BBS, JP  
Hon Alice MAK Mei-kuen, BBS, JP  
Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki  
Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP  
Hon Christopher CHEUNG Wah-fung, SBS, JP  
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung  
Dr Hon Helena WONG Pik-wan  
Hon Elizabeth QUAT, BBS, JP  
Hon Martin LIAO Cheung-kong, GBS, JP  
Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, SBS, JP  
Ir Dr Hon LO Wai-kwok, SBS, MH, JP

Hon CHUNG Kwok-pan  
Hon Alvin YEUNG  
Hon Andrew WAN Siu-kin  
Hon LAM Cheuk-ting  
Hon SHIU Ka-fai, JP  
Hon SHIU Ka-chun  
Hon YUNG Hoi-yan, JP  
Hon CHAN Chun-ying, JP  
Hon LUK Chung-hung, JP  
Hon KWONG Chun-yu  
Hon Jeremy TAM Man-ho  
Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP

**Members absent** : Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, GBS, JP  
Prof Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long, SBS, JP  
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, GBS, JP  
Hon Dennis KWOK Wing-hang  
Hon HUI Chi-fung

[According to the announcement made by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government on 11 November 2020 pursuant to the Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on Issues Relating to the Qualification of the Members of the Legislative Council ("LegCo") of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Kenneth LEUNG, KWOK Ka-ki, Dennis KWOK Wing-hang and Alvin YEUNG were disqualified from being members of LegCo on 30 July 2020.]

**Public officers attending** : Agenda item V

Innovation and Technology Bureau

Dr David CHUNG Wai-keung, JP  
Under Secretary for Innovation and Technology

Ms Eva YAM Ya-ling  
Principal Assistant Secretary for Innovation and  
Technology (3)

Office of the Government Chief Information Officer

Mr Victor LAM Wai-kiu, JP  
Government Chief Information Officer

Agenda item VI

Commerce and Economic Development Bureau

Mr Clement LEUNG, JP  
Permanent Secretary for Commerce and Economic  
Development (Communications and Creative  
Industries)

Ms Carol YUEN, JP  
Deputy Secretary for Commerce and Economic  
Development (Communications and Creative  
Industries)

Mr Keith GIANG  
Principal Assistant Secretary for Commerce and  
Economic Development (Communications and  
Creative Industries)A

Office of the Communications Authority

Mr Chaucer LEUNG, JP  
Director-General of Communications

Mr Sanda CHEUK  
Deputy Director-General  
(Telecommunications)

**Clerk in attendance** : Mr Daniel SIN  
Chief Council Secretary (1)6

**Staff in attendance** : Ms Mandy LI  
Senior Council Secretary (1)6

Mr Patrick CHOI  
Council Secretary (1)6

Miss Yolanda CHEUK  
Legislative Assistant (1)6

Ms Christy YAU  
Legislative Assistant (1)8

Ms Clara LO  
Legislative Assistant (1)9

Ms Yvonna HO  
Clerical Assistant (1)6

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Action

**I. Election of Deputy Chairman**

Election of Deputy Chairman

The Chairman briefed members on the relevant provisions of the Rules of Procedures and House Rules regarding the election of Deputy Chairman of the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting ("the Panel"). He referred members to the letters from 24 members (issued to all Members through email vide LC Paper No. CB(1)15/20-21 on 15 October 2020) indicating that they would not accept nomination for the position(s) of Panel Chairman and/or Deputy Chairman. The Chairman then invited nominations for the deputy chairmanship for the 2020-2021 session.

2. Mr Charles MOK was nominated by Ms Claudia MO and the nomination was seconded by Mr James TO. Mr Charles MOK accepted the nomination.

3. Mr CHAN Kin-por was nominated by Ms YUNG Hoi-yan and the nomination was seconded by Mr CHAN Chun-ying. Mr CHAN Kin-por accepted the nomination.

4. There being no other nominations, the Chairman announced a vote by secret ballot. The Chairman instructed the staff to distribute a ballot paper to each of the members present.

5. After members present had cast their votes, the Chairman invited Ms Claudia MO and Ms YUNG Hoi-yan who had made the nominations to monitor the counting of votes. Of the members present, eight members voted for Mr Charles MOK and 18 members voted for Mr CHAN Kin-por. The Chairman announced that Mr CHAN Kin-por was elected Deputy Chairman of the Panel for the 2020-2021 session.

## **II. Confirmation of minutes of meeting**

(LC Paper No. CB(1)127/20-21 -- Minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2020)

6. The minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2020 were confirmed.

## **III. Information papers issued since the meeting on 8 June 2020**

(LC Paper No. CB(1)123/20-21(01) -- Letter from Hon Charles Peter MOK proposing items for discussion by the Panel in the 2020-2021 session (Chinese version only)

LC Paper No. CB(1)123/20-21(02) -- Letter from Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG proposing items for discussion by the Panel in the 2020-2021 session (Chinese version only)

LC Paper No. CB(1)123/20-21(03) -- Letter from Hon Claudia MO proposing items for discussion by the Panel in the 2020-2021 session (Chinese version only))

7. Members noted that the above papers had been issued since the meeting held on 8 June 2020.

8. The Chairman referred to a letter dated 20 October 2020 from Mr Charles MOK proposing items for discussion by the Panel in the 2020-2021 session. The Chairman said that he had conveyed Mr MOK's suggestion to the Administration for consideration. The Administration had responded that the subject matters relevant to the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, including encouraging participation of small and medium enterprises and start-ups in government procurements, training on digital skills and supply of technology talents, and extension of fifth generation mobile communications ("5G") network, would be covered in the proposed agenda items for the current session.

**IV. Items for discussion at the next meeting**

(LC Paper No. CB(1)97/20-21(01) -- List of outstanding items for discussion)

Capital Works Reserve Fund Head 710 Computerization Subhead A007GX (Block Allocation) – New Administrative Computer Systems

9. Mr Charles MOK queried when the item "Capital Works Reserve Fund Head 710 Computerization Subhead A007GX (Block Allocation) – New Administrative Computer Systems" would be discussed by the Panel. The Chairman said that the Administration had requested for the item to be discussed in conjunction with the block allocation proposal on other works projects. He saw the merits of holding a joint meeting with the Panel on Development, and was exploring with the Chairman of the Panel on Development on the meeting arrangement.

*(Post-meeting note: Members were informed vide LC Paper No. CB(1)175/20-21 issued on 11 December 2020 that a joint meeting of the two Panels had been scheduled for Tuesday, 24 November 2020, from 2:30 pm to 4:00 pm, to discuss the item "Capital Works Reserve Fund Block Allocations for 2021-2022, and proposal to increase the financial ceilings of the delegated authority for Category D items in the Capital Works Programme and Block Allocation Subhead on Computerisation".)*

Policy briefing on 1 December 2020

10. Members noted that the Chief Executive planned to deliver the Policy Address on 25 November 2020, and a meeting of the Panel was tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, 1 December 2020 to receive briefings by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology ("S for IT") and the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development on the relevant policy initiatives in the Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address.

*(Post-meeting note: Members were informed of the policy briefing arrangement on 18 November 2020 vide LC Paper No. CB(1)239/20-21.)*

Regular meeting on 14 December 2020

11. Members noted that the next regular Panel meeting would be held on Monday, 14 December 2020 at 2:30 pm to discuss the following items:

- (a) Update on smart city development; and
- (b) Report on the work of Create Hong Kong and Hong Kong Design Centre and proposed injection into the CreateSmart Initiative.

(*Post-meeting note*: The Chairman subsequently directed that the meeting on 14 December 2020 be cancelled.)

Proposed discussion items for future meetings

*Radio Television Hong Kong*

12. Dr Helena WONG expressed concern that Hong Kong's press freedom was under threat when a producer of Radio Television Hong Kong ("RTHK") was arrested just for using vehicle registration searches in her editorial work. She said that the Panel should discuss the issue as a matter of urgency at the next regular Panel meeting or at a special meeting to be convened before that time. Mr Michael TIEN expressed a similar concern. The Chairman said that he would consider Dr WONG's suggestion and inform members of his decision separately.

13. Ms Claudia MO referred to her letter dated 2 November 2020 to the Panel Chairman (LC Paper No. CB(1)123/20-21(03)) and reiterated her request for the Panel to discuss the operation of RTHK at the next Panel meeting or a special meeting to be convened.

14. The Chairman commented that the Panel should review and discuss issues relating to RTHK in a holistic manner, and that he planned to hold a meeting in April 2021 for the purpose.

*Digital inclusion*

15. Mr Michael TIEN suggested that the Administration should discuss with the Panel on the promotion of the wider application of technologies on services for the elderly. The Chairman said that the subject might be discussed under the proposed item "Progress report on digital inclusion" which was planned to be included in the agenda of the Panel meeting in June 2021.

*Legal liabilities of accessing and disseminating information in social networking platforms*

16. Mr SHIU Ka-fai was concerned that many fake news reports and information promoting hatred were being circulated in the Internet unregulated. He requested that a meeting should be fixed to discuss the item "Legal liabilities of accessing and disseminating information in social networking platforms" on the "List of outstanding items for discussion" (LC Paper No. CB(1)97/20-21(01)).

**V. Application of information technology to combat COVID-19**

(LC Paper No. CB(1)97/20-21(02) -- Administration's paper on application of information technology to combat COVID-19)

Briefing by the Administration

17. At the invitation of the Chairman, Under Secretary for Innovation and Technology ("US for IT") gave introductory remarks on the application of information technology ("IT") in combating coronavirus disease 2019 ("COVID-19") in Hong Kong. Government Chief Information Officer ("GCIO") said that the Government had taken a series of measures to contain the spread of the disease, including, among other things, the "StayHomeSafe" app with geofencing capability to be paired with Bluetooth low energy electronic wristbands, the "Interactive Map Dashboard on the Latest Situation of Coronavirus Disease in Hong Kong" and the "LeaveHomeSafe" exposure notification mobile application ("App"). Details of the briefing were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(1)97/20-21(02)).

Discussion

*"LeaveHomeSafe" exposure notification mobile application*

18. Members noted that the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer ("OGCIO") would launch the "LeaveHomeSafe" COVID-19 exposure notification mobile app to assist the public in recording the date and time for checking into and leaving different venues by scanning the venue QR code or the registration mark located at the inside of the taxi door. There were currently more than 6 000 public and private venues that had pledged support for the scheme. Passengers could also directly use the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app in more than 18 000 taxis to record journeys. Ms Elizabeth QUAT pointed out that the public was most concerned whether the Administration could effectively combat the COVID-19 pandemic in a bid to achieving zero infection level so that cross-boundary travel could be resumed and the economy could be restarted. While welcoming the launch of the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app, Ms QUAT queried about the effectiveness of the app and whether the app would have a low utilization rate if participation by venue operators and individuals would be entirely voluntary. Ms QUAT commented that the Administration should consider introducing compulsory infection control measures to combat the next wave of the epidemic so that the economy could recover.

19. US for IT advised that the Administration would continue with anti-epidemic efforts to suppress the epidemic. For example, OGCIO would launch the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app to encourage the public to keep a more



precise visit record so as to help contact tracing. Meanwhile, the Administration had been actively engaging various sectors and enlisting their support for the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app. On the other hand, the Administration would distribute specimen bottles in the general out-patient clinics of Hospital Authority or the specimen collection points under the Department of Health ("DH") to encourage the wider use of community testing.

20. Mr CHAN Chun-ying said that S for IT had recently told the media that the implementation of "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app would cover premises including restaurants, bars or pubs, markets, indoor sports centres, libraries, etc., while the mobile app could also be used in taxis. Holding the view that taking public transport would expose a person/passenger to higher health risks, Mr CHAN queried why the Administration had proposed to display the venue QR codes at markets and libraries but not public transport. He further asked about the criteria for selecting venues for displaying the QR codes.

21. GCIO explained that, as advised by DH, the implementation of "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app should cover premises where a large number of people were congregating and in close distance with each other, or where activities were conducted with people/participants taking off their masks. To encourage wider participation of the private sector in the scheme, the Administration would start with the public sector and display venue QR codes at public places, such as markets and indoor venues. As for public transport where most passengers were already wearing masks, DH considered that there would not be significant risk of spreading the virus.

22. Ms Claudia MO asked whether the Administration would set out in the terms of use of the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app that all the recorded data would only be used for assisting DH in relevant contact tracing so as to allay public concerns towards the protection of user's privacy. Mr Charles MOK urged the Administration to make it clear to the public that the use of the app was voluntary. Noting that visit records collected by the app would be kept in users' mobile phones only and removed automatically after 31 days, Ms MO queried if other government departments could obtain such data within 31 days. She also enquired whether users would be sent to designated quarantine centres if they had visited the same venues as the COVID-19 confirmed cases at around the same time together.

23. GCIO assured members that relevant venue check-in data would only be kept in the app inside the user's mobile phone. The data would not be transferred to the Government's repository or any other systems. Meanwhile, user's check-in data would be erased automatically after 31 days and therefore no data could be kept by other departments. GCIO further explained that the Centre for Health Protection ("CHP") had been releasing information on premises visited by people/patients with COVID-19 confirmed cases in the form of open data. The "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app would download the data from

CHP for comparing with user's venue check-in data regularly inside the mobile phone, in order to notify any user who had visited the same venue as the COVID-19 confirmed case at around the same time automatically. The Administration would continue to encourage members of the public to use the "LeaveHomeSafe" app to record their visits.

24. Mr SHIU Ka-fai expressed gratitude to the Administration for its efforts in combating the epidemic with the aid of technology, including conducting virus testing services, disseminating latest messages to the public and providing suitable relief to assist people and industries affected by the epidemic. Mr SHIU suggested that the Administration should step up publicity through various channels, including television, to elucidate that the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app was a digital tool that was convenient to use and would enable the public in recording the date and time for checking into and leaving different venues. The users' visit records would assist DH in contact tracing if a confirmed case was later discovered at a participating venue. He further pointed out that various industries, such as hair salons, beauty parlours, massage establishments and karaoke establishments, had likewise maintained records of their customers' information. Mr SHIU asked the Administration to organize briefing sessions for the wholesale and retail sectors so as to garner their support for the app and to join hands in combating the epidemic. GCIO took note of Mr SHIU's views.

25. Dr Fernando CHEUNG referred to the MIT Technology Review on the guiding principles of developing automated contact tracing apps, and asked whether the source code of the "LeaveHomeSafe" app would be made public. Dr CHEUNG pointed out that the source code would facilitate members of the public in understanding how the mobile app tracked users' movement and the accessibility of the app, etc. The Chairman said that the use of tracing app was not at all uncommon, and for example, cycling tracker apps had already been used to record routes of users. GCIO advised that the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app had undergone privacy impact assessment conducted by an independent third party. The mobile app was available for public download in the Apple Store and Google Play which had passed the review of the two app stores to ensure they meet the relevant user privacy requirements. The Administration would, nevertheless, consider Dr CHEUNG's suggestion.

26. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan suggested that inbound travellers from high-risk places, particularly those that were subject to 14-day compulsory quarantine at hotels upon entry since 13 November 2020, should be required to download the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app with a view to recording their whereabouts after completion of the compulsory quarantine at hotels. She took the view that the "LeaveHomeSafe" app would help tracing asymptomatic travellers of COVID-19. The Chairman enquired if any regulations should be made under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599) for the purpose of further tightening of quarantine arrangement and protecting public health in

Hong Kong. GCIO undertook to consider Dr CHIANG's suggestion.

*Compulsory quarantine arrangements and the use of electronic wristbands*

27. Dr Helena WONG noticed that with effect from 13 November 2020, incoming travellers arriving in Hong Kong from areas outside the Mainland would be subject to compulsory quarantine at hotels. She expressed concern that such arrangement might lead to further outbreaks and more confirmed cases might be identified in relation to a vacation at a local hotel (known as "staycation"). In this context, she sought details of the compulsory quarantine arrangements, including whether the Administration would use electronic wristbands to monitor that people who were subject to the 14-day compulsory quarantine and ensure that they would neither leave their hotel rooms nor move around in the hotels. Dr WONG further sought details of surveillance of compulsory quarantine using electronic wristbands, including among the 390 000 people using wristbands, the number of persons who had breached compulsory quarantine requirement, such as taking off wristbands and leaving the places of quarantine.

28. GCIO responded that the Administration would continue to distribute to persons under compulsory quarantine an electronic wristband that was paired with the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app. While the wristbands currently in use were not equipped with global positioning system (GPS) function, the "StayHomeSafe" app had adopted geo-fencing technology to detect the surrounding wireless signals including Bluetooth signal of the electronic wristband, etc., in order to ascertain whether persons under quarantine stayed at the designated premises. OGCIO had, in parallel, checked the locations of people under quarantine from time to time and made surprise video calls to ensure that they were staying at their dwelling places. GCIO further said that during the monitoring process, if abnormal situations were observed, the relevant departments would be informed to take follow-up action as appropriate. For example, OGCIO had found several dozen cases on average each month where the quarantine conditions were suspected to have been breached, and DH and Police were notified promptly to take follow-up actions. DH would press ahead with prosecution against individuals who had violated quarantine orders after collecting the required evidence.

29. In response to Dr Helena WONG's further query about whether it was easy for persons under compulsory quarantine to untie their electronic wristbands, GCIO said that in case anyone under quarantine took off the wristband and was detected, the Administration would be notified by the system to take follow-up action.

30. Expressing concern about new confirmed cases with unknown sources recorded in the past 10 days, Mr Michael TIEN did not expect cross-boundary travel could resume soon. Mr TIEN mentioned that he had earlier referred a

technology start-up to the Administration for the production of electronic wristbands. The cost of the electronic wristbands could be reduced when they were produced in large quantities. He asked whether the Administration had followed up with the start-up company, and whether the latter had successfully bid for the production of electronic wristbands.

31. GCIO said that OGCIO had been conducting tender exercises for acquiring electronic wristbands, in which the start-up company was successful in bidding for most of the contracts given its lowest tender price. Currently, most of the electronic wristbands were provided by the start-up company. In this regard, the unit cost of electronic wristband had been reduced significantly from about US\$10 to US\$5.

32. Mr Michael TIEN considered that there were loopholes during the quarantine period. He explained that if a person under compulsory quarantine did not activate the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app immediately upon arrival at the Hong Kong International Airport ("HKIA"), it might delay the activation of the mobile app and failed to trace the location of a person under compulsory quarantine, which would render 14-day compulsory quarantine arrangements useless. He enquired about the number of people under compulsory quarantine who had not activated the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app on the same day of their arrival in Hong Kong.

33. GCIO explained that the activation of "StayHomeSafe" app involved two steps. All inbound travellers were required to put on an electronic wristband and install the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app at HKIA. To allow "StayHomeSafe" app to collect the wireless signals of the location, confinees were required to walk around their dwelling places after returning home. Generally speaking, nearly 99% of persons under compulsory quarantine had activated "StayHomeSafe" mobile app within one day after returning home. OGCIO offered appropriate assistance to those who had yet to activate the mobile app and reported to DH and Police for suspected cases where the quarantine conditions were suspected to have been breached. At the request of the Chairman, the Administration would provide a written response to Mr Michael TIEN's question after the meeting.

*(Post-meeting note: The Administration's response was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1)461/20-21(01) on 11 January 2021.)*

34. While commending that the Administration had achieved substantial progress in applying IT to combat the epidemic, Mr CHAN Han-pan expressed concerns about the risk of transmission in the community before inbound travellers going to the hotel or a designated place to undergo the compulsory quarantine. He questioned whether and, if so, how the Administration would plug the loopholes by using IT solutions to reinforce contact tracing measures.

35. GCIO said that the Administration had been sparing no effort in containing the spread of the disease through a multi-pronged approach. To his understanding, all persons would be required to undergo testing for COVID-19 upon their arrival at HKIA and wait for their test results at a designated location, such as the holding hotel. Only with negative test results would they be allowed to leave HKIA/holding hotel and return home or other residences as soon as possible to undergo the compulsory quarantine.

36. Despite the fact that inbound travellers were required to present negative nucleic acid test result for COVID-19 before entering Hong Kong, and to undertake testing for COVID-19 upon entry, Mr CHAN Han-pan held the view that, for the sake of public health, more surveillance measures should be put in place to control the epidemic. Noting that the Administration had adopted IT solutions to help combat the epidemic, he asked whether and how the Administration would assist local innovation and technology industry in expanding into overseas markets. GCIO advised that many overseas economies had approached Compathnion Technology Limited, which developed the "StayHomeSafe" app paired with the electronic wristbands, on possible technology solutions so as to strengthen the anti-epidemic capability in their places.

*"Hong Kong Health Code" system*

37. Ms Elizabeth QUAT and Mr SHIU Ka-fai called on the Administration to expedite the launch of the "Hong Kong Health Code" system.

38. Mr Charles MOK noted that a Health Code initiative would be launched after the epidemic situation had stabilized so as to gradually resume travel between Hong Kong and Guangdong/Macao. He pointed out that there were public concerns over potential privacy issues, such as whether the Health Code would be used for accessing to certain venues in the Mainland, including shopping arcades, markets and restaurants. Mr MOK queried whether the Health Code system was in fact a means to restrict the citizen's freedom in Hong Kong. He mentioned that some Members had proposed that the Health Code should be used for accessing to local catering premises, and asked about the Government's stance in launching the Health Code.

39. US for IT said that S for IT had on different occasions responded to such issues and elaborated on the Government's stance. The "Hong Kong Health Code" was prepared solely for the purpose of facilitating movement of people across the boundary, while "LeaveHomeSafe" exposure notification mobile app would be for voluntary adoption to help combat the COVID-19 epidemic.

*Cash payout scheme*

40. Noting that OGCIO had developed a centralized registration platform for

data validation and eligibility checking for the cash payout scheme, Mr CHAN Chun-ying asked whether and how the platform in question would help shorten the lead time and expedite the cash disbursement if a similar scheme was to be implemented in the future.

41. GCIO indicated that the Administration and banks had taken about four months to establish a registration platform for the cash payout scheme as well as disburse payment to eligible people. As most members of the public had already submitted electronic registrations for the cash payout scheme and given consent on the reuse of their personal data such as bank account number, it was anticipated that the Administration could disburse the cash to eligible persons within one month if similar cash disbursement schemes were introduced in the future. As regards registration by paper forms, the Administration would explore other technology solutions to facilitate the cash disbursement. For instance, the Administration would launch the "iAM Smart" platform in the fourth quarter this year. With the adoption of the "iAM Smart" platform or the faster payment system launched by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, the Administration could in future expedite the disbursement of cash or subsidies to people who had not yet provided their bank account information for electronic registrations.

## **VI. Facilitative measures for telecommunications operators to extend mobile network coverage**

(LC Paper No. CB(1)97/20-21(03) -- Administration's paper on facilitative measures for telecommunications operators to extend mobile network coverage

LC Paper No. CB(1)97/20-21(04) -- Paper on the facilitative measures for telecommunications operators to establish base stations for the extension of mobile network coverage prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (Background brief)

### Briefing by the Administration

42. At the invitation of the Chairman, Permanent Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development (Communications and Creative Industries) ("PS(CCI)") and Deputy Director-General (Telecommunications), Office of the Communications Authority briefed members on the Administration's facilitative

measures for telecommunications operators ("operators") to extend mobile network coverage, in particular the strategies on the 5G development in Hong Kong. Details of the briefing were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(1)97/20-21(03)).

Discussion

*Pilot Scheme for Installation of Radio Base Stations at Selected Government Venues*

43. Mr Charles Peter MOK enquired about the numbers of applications submitted and approved under the Pilot Scheme for Installation of Radio Base Stations at Selected Government Venues ("the Pilot Scheme"), the processing time of these applications, and the number of government premises at which radio base stations ("RBSs") had been installed and put into operation. Mr MOK also requested the Administration to explain the apparently small number of applications for the Pilot Scheme received.

44. Director-General of Communications, Office of the Communications Authority ("DGC") advised that 52 out of 127 applications received to date under the Pilot Scheme had been approved, and tenancy agreements had been concluded for 32 of them. DGC said that the response was considered satisfactory. The Administration would continue to facilitate mobile network operators' ("MNOs") installation of RBSs.

45. Mr CHAN Han-pan commented that there should be far more than 1 000 government premises that were suitable for the installation of RBSs territory-wide. He queried the Administration's decision of making available only 1 000 locations for the Pilot Scheme. PS(CCI) advised that apart from using the premises identified under the Pilot Scheme, MNOs might apply to the Administration for the use of government premises other than the 1 000 selected premises. The Administration would provide suitable assistance to facilitate the application process. Furthermore, the Administration had streamlined the procedure for processing applications for installing telecommunications facilities on external walls of buildings. PS(CCI) said that these series of measures should help expedite the effective roll-out of 5G services.

*Coverage of 5G network*

46. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan, Mr CHAN Han-pan and Mr KWOK Wai-keung asked where mobile service users could access 5G services, and whether the Administration could inform the public about the availability of 5G network coverage. Dr CHIANG said that 5G connectivity was not satisfactory in the Central District. She asked the Administration to liaise with MNOs, which had been allocated the required spectrum, to extend the coverage of 5G services. PS(CCI) and DGC replied that 5G services had been launched in April 2020,

and within six months or so, they were available in more than 50 MTR stations. The "Golden Bowl Area", which included Central, Admiralty, Wan Chai, Causeway Bay, Tsim Sha Tsui, Mong Kok and Shum Shui Po, should have been well-covered.

47. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan and the Chairman enquired about the timetable for achieving full 5G network coverage in Hong Kong. PS(CCI) said that MNOs expected that outdoor coverage of 5G networks should reach 90% of the population within this year. The quality of reception, however, might be subject to a host of factors such as the location and the range of spectrum used by users' devices. PS(CCI) said that whenever mobile technology was upgraded to a new generation, there would be a transitional process. 5G services had only been launched in Hong Kong for six months and it would take time to improve. It would be more appropriate for MNOs to determine the pace and strategy by which 5G services were to be rolled out. It was in their commercial interest to keep improving their customers' user experience, as they needed to take into consideration users' experience with the new technology.

48. The Chairman noted that currently MNOs had installed RBSs at some 10 000 locations in Hong Kong, and that the Office of the Communications Authority had approved more than 2 000 5G RBSs since 2019. He asked whether the newly approved 5G RBSs were installed in the 10 000 locations, the number of 5G RBSs that would be required in order for the 5G service to operate effectively, and the number of these base stations currently in operation. DGC said that RBSs installed in the 10 000 locations were being used for various generations of mobile services, and most of the 2 000 new RBSs approved were installed in these locations. MNOs might also provide 5G services using current RBSs through software upgrade. DGC added that there were altogether some 5 000 5G RBSs in operation, but the coverage of 5G services was yet to be as wide as 4G. DGC further explained that MNOs had been assigned new 5G spectrum for less than a year, and they had accorded priority to providing services in the Golden Bowl Area. MNOs would continue to improve service in remote and less populated areas.

49. Mr CHAN Han-pan expressed concern about inadequate coverage of mobile services in rural areas and asked if the Administration would provide more government premises for the setting up of RBSs. DGC responded that since the launch of the Pilot Scheme, over 30 RBSs had been installed at government premises in country parks or other remote areas in Hong Kong. PS(CCI) said that the Subsidy Scheme to Extend Fibre-based Networks to Villages in Remote Areas had been implemented in 2019, and it would help provide the backbone infrastructure for expansion of 5G coverage to remote areas. The Administration would also provide technical assistance to improve telecommunications services in rural areas and to help implement smart city initiatives in the countryside.



*The Administration's role in the extension of mobile networks*

50. Mr CHAN Han-pan suggested that to widen telecommunications service coverage, the Administration should draw references from the Mainland where local authorities erect poles on which RBSs could be mounted. DGC said that given Hong Kong's local environment, it might be difficult to have land plots for planting such large structures. PS(CCI) said that in addition to making available government premises for installation of RBSs, the Administration had adopted measures to facilitate the processing of applications for installing low-power transmission facilities, and for mounting telecommunications facilities in external walls or roofs of existing buildings. In response to Mr CHAN Han-pan's query on whether the Administration should take the initiative to provide telecommunications infrastructure such as transmission towers, PS(CCI) said that it would involve a rather complicated and protracted process to construct such facilities, and there might not be suitable government land for such purpose. The Administration considered it more appropriate for MNOs to come up with suggestions according to their operational needs and the Administration could then render assistance as appropriate.

51. The Chairman and Mr CHAN Han-pan commented that the Administration seemed only to be paying lip service to promoting 5G development in Hong Kong without playing an active role in ensuring that MNOs were delivering satisfactory service and coverage to customers. The Chairman added that if there were still demand for 4G services, MNOs might be less willing to shift more of their spectrum for 5G services unless the Administration imposed the relevant conditions on their telecommunications licences. PS(CCI) said that expanding 5G services and widening 5G coverage would incur significant additional capital investment by MNOs. It would be more appropriate for MNOs to assess how they should provide services and the Administration would play a facilitating role in meeting MNOs' operational needs.

52. Mr CHAN Han-pan asked the Administration to intervene and require MNOs or developers to improve the network quality in rural areas. PS(CCI) replied that the Administration could not mandate developers or property owners to open up private premises for installation of RBSs. Instead, the Administration would consider making available government premises for installation of base stations.

53. The Chairman, Mr CHAN Han-pan and Dr CHIANG Lai-wan commented that the Administration should take a more active role in encouraging operators to roll out 5G networks quickly. In particular, the Chairman said that, rather than leaving it to MNOs to deal with individual government departments, it was often easier for Bureaux and Departments to coordinate among themselves in implementing measures to facilitate the development of 5G services. The Administration should have a strategy on 5G

development. He asked the Administration to get prepared and report to the Panel what locations could be made available for the installation of RBSs at the Panel meeting in February or March when the Administration would brief the Panel on the progress of the Subsidy Scheme for Encouraging Early Deployment of 5G.

*Penetration ability of 5G signals*

54. Mr KWOK Wai-keung said that reception of 4G signals had been poor in pockets of urban areas. Mr KWOK enquired whether 5G signals could have better penetration than 4G ones, and if not, whether operators would be required to install more RBSs in urban areas to avoid such reception problems from happening again in the 5G era.

55. DGC advised that the penetration ability of telecommunications signals depended on the band of the spectrum, as well as the number and proximity of RBSs: the lower the frequency band, the higher the penetration ability. Although the spectrum assigned to MNOs since 2019 for the provision of 5G mobile services were in the mid- and high-band spectrum, and thus the signals' penetration ability was moderate, the Administration planned to supply low-band spectrum in the 600 and 700 MHz bands following the switching off of analogue television services at 23:59 on 30 November 2020. DGC expected that the deployment of the low-band spectrum and the establishment of more RBSs would improve 5G network coverage in the near future.

*Spectrum allocation*

Admin 56. Dr Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung enquired about the bands of spectrum currently used by operators for the provision of 2G, 3G, 4G and 5G mobile services in Hong Kong, and asked whether the Administration would encourage MNOs to reform their spectrum so as to deploy more frequency bands for 5G services. PS(CCI) advised that the Administration had upheld the technology neutral principle and it would be the operators' commercial decision whether to reform their allocated spectrum for 5G services. PS(CCI) undertook to provide supplementary information on spectrum allocation after the meeting.

*(At 4:26 pm, the Chairman directed that the meeting be extended for 15 minutes.)*

*Measures to encourage deployment of 5G technologies*

57. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan noted that remote surgery was an example of 5G applications. She asked what distinctive advantages 5G technologies had over the earlier generations that could attract the various sectors to deploy 5G technologies. Dr CHIANG also requested the Administration to step up efforts to publicize examples of 5G applications. PS(CCI) advised that the

Administration had launched in May 2020 the Subsidy Scheme for Encouraging Early Deployment of 5G ("Subsidy Scheme") under the Anti-epidemic Fund to encourage various sectors to deploy 5G technology early to foster innovation and smart city applications and to improve efficiency of their operations and quality of their services.

*Internet of Things technology over 5G networks*

Admin 58. Mr Charles Peter MOK asked the Administration to provide information on the number of services/products/applications involving the deployment of Internet of Things ("IoT") technology over 5G networks, and the number of relevant licences granted. DGC advised that three Wireless IoT Licences had been issued, and four mobile network operators were providing IoT services by virtue of their existing Unified Carrier Licences. DGC undertook to provide the requested information after the meeting.

*Digital divide and radiation level of base stations*

59. Dr Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung expressed concern over the affordability of 5G services amid the widening wealth gap and digital divide. Dr CHEUNG asked whether the Administration would, in case 5G services were too expensive to be affordable by people at grassroots level, request operators to pass on the cost savings they enjoyed, as a result of the charging of nominal rent for the use of government premises under the Pilot Scheme, to the low-income groups and students by offering concessions to these groups of customers. Dr CHEUNG also expressed concerns about the health risks due to radiation of transmission from 5G RBSs. He suggested that such facilities should be located in premises far from schools, nurseries and elderly homes.

60. PS(CCI) informed members that according to a recent publication prepared by the International Telecommunication Union, Hong Kong's overall mobile-data prices had been ranked the second most affordable in the region. The affordability of local 5G mobile data plans was also comparable to those in other economies such as the Mainland and South Korea which had launched 5G services.

**VII. Any other business**

61. Members noted that (a) a letter dated 30 October 2020 from Dr Fernando CHEUNG regarding extension of the probation of an RTHK reporter; and (b) a letter dated 2 November 2020 from Ms Claudia MO expressing concern on the operation of RTHK, and requesting that arrangement should be made for the matter to be discussed at this meeting. The Chairman said that it was not appropriate for him to intervene into the matter as mentioned at (a) above at this juncture. In the light of the concerns raised by Mr Charles MOK and Ms MO

about the operation and development of RTHK, the Chairman suggested that the Panel might consider discussing the subject matter when exploring the possibility of integrating RTHK with the Information Services Department in due course.

62. The Chairman said that a joint letter dated 6 November 2020 from Dr KWOK Ka-ki, Mr Dennis KWOK, Mr Alvin YEUNG and Mr Jeremy TAM Man-ho requesting the Panel to hold a special meeting to discuss about the Administration's measures to safeguard press freedom. They also suggested that inviting media organizations to the meeting to express their views. Mr CHAN Han-pan commented that in view of the latest local epidemic situation, it was not appropriate to hold a public hearing to receive views from the public on the subject. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan queried whether the Panel should deal with an individual case. Given that the case was related to the conduct of vehicle registration searches, she considered that the matter should be followed up by the Panel on Transport. The Chairman said that he would determine how the matter should be pursued at the next meeting.

63. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:47 pm.